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New York

President: Mr. Ping ..... (Gabon)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Kazykhanov (Kazakhstan), Vice President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3:10 p.m.

Agenda item 36 (*continued*)

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/59/431, A/59/574)

Draft resolutions (A/59/L.39 and A/59/L.40)

Mr. van den Berg (Netherlands): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The candidate countries Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia, the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro, and the European Free Trade Association countries Iceland and Liechtenstein, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union expresses its solidarity with the Palestinian people at this difficult time. It encourages the Palestinian leadership to demonstrate a strong sense of responsibility in ensuring the regular functioning of Palestinian institutions. The European Union considers that it is essential that a legitimate leadership continue to resolutely pursue the path towards peace in the Middle East.

At the moment, there is a window of opportunity to revive the Middle East peace process. We therefore call on all parties to demonstrate the necessary courage and leadership to break through the present deadlock, put an end to the hostilities and re-engage in a serious political process as set out in the road map.

The European Union remains committed to the two-State solution as laid out in the road map and agreed between the parties, which would result in a viable, contiguous, sovereign and independent Palestinian State, existing side by side in peace with an Israel, living within recognized and secure borders.

The European Union has welcomed the Knesset vote on 26 October to support an Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza strip and part of the northern West Bank. The European Union expresses its willingness to support such a withdrawal as a first step in the overall process, in accordance with the conditions laid out by the European Union in March 2004, among which is the condition that it take place in the context of the road map. The European Union also recalls the Quartet statement of 22 September.

The European Union has endorsed the short-term programme of action in the fields of security, reforms, elections and the economy proposed by the High Representative. It underlines in particular its readiness to support the electoral process in the Palestinian territories. We call on the Palestinian Authority to organize elections in accordance with international standards under the authority of an independent

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electoral commission, and we call upon Israel to facilitate those elections.

The European Union stresses that those initiatives will need full cooperation from and between the parties, as well as coordination with other partners involved, especially in the region — in particular with Egypt — and within the Quartet. We reiterate our readiness to support the Palestinian Authority in taking responsibility for law and order.

Finally, in the current difficult circumstances, the European Union will work with Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the international community to contribute to realizing the aspirations of the Palestinian people and achieving a two-State solution, with both Israel and Palestine living side by side peacefully within secure and recognized borders. We wish to stress that both parties can count on the undiminished support of the European Union on the path towards a peaceful, durable and just settlement of the conflict. We are convinced that this goal can be achieved for both Israelis and Palestinians. Moreover, we are convinced this will contribute to peace in the region.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): Martin Luther King once said that there comes a time when people get tired. For the peoples of the Middle East — all the people of the Middle East — that time has come. The people of the Middle East are tired — tired of bloodshed and tired of violence. They are tired of terrorism, tired of despotism and tired of hatred. They are tired of corrupt leaderships that do nothing to foster harmony, yet do all that they can to stifle it. They are tired of the adoption of anachronistic and one-sided resolutions that are as disconnected from reality as they are from the noble ideals upon which this Organization was founded.

Today we hear voices of reason and voices of rejection, voices that call for progress and yet also voices brimming with fatal stagnation — as we heard just yesterday in this Hall when the Palestinian voice not only proved once again that they never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity, but also showed that, sadly, as far as the Palestinians are concerned, there is no present and no future, but only the past happening over and over and over again. Hopefully that is a lone voice, as we truly believe that most Palestinians want and deserve better.

But theirs are voices that we fail to hear — the voices of people throughout the Middle East looking for responsible leadership, not repressive rule, the voices of those looking for the opportunities provided by democracy and respect for human rights, and ready to live in peace with their neighbours. As we consider the situation in the Middle East, we must allow those voices to echo throughout this Hall and seek ways to empower the moderates throughout the region who want to realize that vision.

Israel believes that it is in dialogue that hope is born, and it is through dialogue that progress is achieved. Israel has always understood that every nation has rights and every nation has responsibilities. We recognize the needs of all our neighbours to live in peace and prosperity. From its earliest days as a modern State, Israel has offered an outstretched hand to those genuinely committed to peace, and we have proven ourselves ready to follow the path of mutual recognition and mutual compromise.

Those principles have driven the success we have had in establishing peace treaties with two of our neighbours, Egypt and Jordan. Those treaties arose through the drive and strength of courageous Arab leaders — profiles in valour — and provide examples of the positive results that can be achieved if Israel's goodwill is received in kind by those to whom it is offered. Through creating trust and advocating peace, those Arab leaders — President Sadat of Egypt and King Hussein of Jordan — found in their Israeli counterparts brave partners that worked alongside them to create a new reality.

In the 1990s those important treaties led to the improvement of our relations with other States in the region. They provided the crucial momentum necessary for bilateral peace negotiations between Israel and Syria, as well as for the signing of Israeli-Palestinian interim agreements intended to introduce a new era of peace to the Middle East. The result of all of that was a dramatic improvement of economic and social conditions for all inhabitants of the area.

Another result was a demonstration that the path to peace is found through discourse and negotiated settlement and not through anachronistic and one-sided resolutions. Peace will be fashioned in Ramallah and Jerusalem, not in New York and Geneva. Israel knows it has obligations to fulfil and we will not shy away from them, but we are not alone in that regard. Every peace process in the region has succeeded only when it recognized the rights and responsibilities of both sides

and the need for face-to-face dialogue and mutual implementation to achieve real results on the ground. While we were compelled to advance the disengagement plan in the absence of a Palestinian partner for peace, we are hopeful that it can be coordinated and that — as the Quartet has recognized — it can jumpstart the negotiating process, which is the only path to lasting peace.

It is important that the international community and this Assembly support those working towards a peaceful resolution by empowering the peacemakers and disempowering the extremists. Every step taken by the international community must be judged by whether it pushes the parties closer to the negotiating table and to the mutual implementation of obligations or pushes them further apart. Too often, the resolutions and discourse adopted in this Hall have failed that test, promoting acrimony and divisiveness instead of constructive dialogue. Unfortunately, the resolutions presented to the Assembly on the agenda items discussed in the past two days follow that tired and harmful pattern. Accordingly, Israel will be compelled to vote against them. In the spirit of reform and revitalization, and for the sake of peace, it is time to change that counterproductive dynamic.

The Middle East was once a global centre of innovation and progress, a fount of civility and wisdom. Peoples of the region are rightfully proud of that past and they have a right to be hopeful for their future as well. In too many States in the region, however, the people have suffered under dictatorial rule for too long, without the rights to a free press and an independent judiciary or respect for the rule of law. The hopes for peace, stability and prosperity in the Middle East cannot be divorced from those facts. Democratic reform, the teaching of tolerance and coexistence, and respect for human rights are fundamental building blocks to a positive and hopeful future. And they are indispensable stepping stones on the road to true peace.

Governments that glorify murder as martyrdom cannot at the same time foster peace and good-neighbourliness. Governments that tolerate religious extremism at home will not fight for peace abroad. If we encourage a culture of democracy and mutual tolerance in a way that is respectful of local cultures and religious traditions, we sow the seeds of peace. If we reject the tactics of terrorism and the ideology of hate that feeds it, we create the conditions for coexistence and prosperity. The people of the Middle East, and the Palestinians more than anybody, know that democratic reform is central to the hopes and positive future of the region.

The obstacles on the road to a peaceful and prosperous Middle East are many. Israel recognizes that peace is made with one's adversaries, not with one's friends, but peace can only be made with adversaries who indeed want to make peace with you.

Terrorist organizations like Hizbullah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad are, by definition, opposed to peaceful coexistence and determined to prevent reconciliation. Their State sponsors, like Iran and Syria, continue to tolerate and actively support that terrorist activity in violation of their most basic legal and moral obligations, including Security Council resolutions, such as 1373 (2001) and 1566 (2004). While responsible States have mobilized to combat the plague of terrorism, those State supporters of terror have systematically and determinedly worked to turn the region's worst fears into reality.

As a window of opportunity is opening in the Middle East, organizations such as Hizbullah are working hard to shutter it. Hizbullah is a terrorist network with tentacles extending throughout our region and a record of terrorist activity, including airplane hijackings and embassy bombings, throughout the world. As Lebanon continues to flout its basic obligations to prevent cross-border attacks and as Syria continues to exert its control over that country, in violation of Security Council resolutions, Hizbullah becomes a more potent force. It funds and coordinates terror against Israel from Lebanon, as well as from within the West Bank and Gaza. Hizbullah, with the continued support of Iran and Syria, is today intensifying its efforts to ensure that acts of terror kill the fragile hopes for peace and undermine the emergence of a stable and responsible Palestinian leadership. What the world sees as an opportunity, Hizbullah sees as a threat. Just last week, Hizbullah operatives directed an unsuccessful attempt to bring explosives into Israel, and the efforts to execute acts of terror continue with urgency.

In a revealing interview given recently by Nawaf Musawi, of Hizbullah's so-called political leadership, the destructive intentions of that terrorist organizations were made painfully clear. Like other Hizbullah leaders, he called for the continuation of Palestinian

violence and terror and pledged Hizbullah's ongoing support for such activity.

Behind Hizbullah lies the support of Iran, a regime that openly calls for Israel's destruction and is further exacerbating the dangers in the Middle East through its nuclear programme. That presents not a local or regional threat, but a global threat with existential repercussions for many of the States represented here. Iran's malignant nuclear intentions are a danger not only to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, but also to London, Paris, Berlin and southern Russia. Everyone present should beware of the potential implications of ignoring the nexus between terror and tyranny, and between terror groups, State sponsors and weapons of mass destruction.

If the international community is serious about taking advantage of the opportunity before us, it is not enough to encourage and empower those committed to peace. We must also confront those opposed to it. We must show the same urgency and determination in combating those forces as they do in pursuing their hateful agenda. Without that, moderates in the region — be they in Iraq, the West Bank or elsewhere in the Middle East — have no chance to succeed. Without that, we will record yet another missed opportunity on the road to peace. This is no time for complacency or false equivalencies. Treating those engaged in terror and those determined, under difficult conditions, to respond to it as though they were moral equals is not amoral — it is immoral.

We remain hopeful that the circle of peace in the Middle East can be widened and Israel is, as always, ready to reach a genuine and lasting peace with all its neighbours. At the same time, the readiness of every State of the Middle East to embark on a path of reform and peace must be judged by its actions, not by its words. We have all had our fill of false promises and publicity stunts. If we are genuine in our desire for peace, the international community and the United Nations must make clear to the enemies of peace that their destructive behaviour will no longer be tolerated and that one cannot sponsor peace and sponsor terrorism at the same time.

We are at a moment in time when we have an opportunity to effect real change. For today, to quote Martin Luther King once again, "We ain't where we want to be, we ain't where we're going to be, but thank God, we ain't where we were".

The whole Middle East stands at a point in history suffused with frenetic changes. We must harness the promise of improvement arrayed before us and, along with the international community, stand firmly against those who would resist it. All States and peoples in the Middle East deserve better, and Israel is committed to achieving that in partnership with its neighbours in the region. We call on all our neighbours to accept our goodwill and to return it in kind. All of us are tired of pain and violence, and it is high time that the Middle East, known in history as the cradle of civilization, reclaimed that legacy.

Mr. Al-Hussein (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): We share the profound sadness of our Palestinian brothers and of the Arab nation at the passing of the late President Arafat. At the same time, we look forward to a phase that, no matter how fraught with difficulties, will enable us to realize the vision, set out and recently reaffirmed by President Bush, of the establishment of a Palestinian State that would live side by side with Israel in peace. That must begin with a great and courageous step on the part of the Palestinians: to conduct free and democratic presidential elections at the beginning of next year with the support of all parties concerned.

That vision can become a reality only through sincere commitment by the Israelis and the Palestinians to the implementation of the road map. At the same time, Israel should cease all forms of settlement activity, including the construction of the separation wall, end extrajudicial killings, arbitrary practices and actions that violate the Fourth Geneva Convention and international law, and stop the demolition of Palestinian homes and refugee camps. The Palestinian side should continue its structural and security reforms and put an end to all forms of violence. The international community, for its part, should ensure the implementation of the commitments of both parties under the road map, with appropriate and effective supervision by the Quartet. The time has come to take immediate action to put an end to violence and to the killing of civilians. It is time to return to the political path charted in the road map.

We reiterate that we would welcome an Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, on two conditions: first, that it be carried out as part of the road map; and secondly, that it be followed by Israel's expeditious withdrawal from the West Bank, which would put an

end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967.

I should like to reiterate what was stated by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Jordan in the general debate during this session of the General Assembly (see A/59/PV.12) regarding respect for and implementation of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the construction of the separation wall that Israel is currently building within the occupied territories. In addition, we welcome General Assembly resolution ES-10/15 as an important step that reflects the international community's recognition of the legal consequences of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice as well as the need for its implementation. The separation wall — since it is an obstacle to the establishment of a viable, independent Palestinian State — is also a threat to the national security of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty. We have been looking forward to an era of peace and stability in the Middle East — an era in which the occupation would end and the Palestinians would have the opportunity to live dignified lives on their own land, free from suppression, oppression and humiliation.

For our part, we stand side by side with all those who are interested in achieving peace, security and stability. We stand by our Palestinian brothers so that they can realize their aspirations to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent State on their national soil on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the principle of land for peace, the road map and the Arab peace initiative.

Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): Unlike other regions, the Middle East has been subjected for many centuries to external threats, an onslaught of injustice, the falsification of facts and the use of force against its people, in a continuous process in which its potential is threatened and its intellectual and material wealth is squandered in a manner that prevents its development and stifles its potential.

Israel's occupation of the remaining parts of Palestine and of the Syrian Golan following the 1967 aggression and the continuation of that occupation for more than 36 years constitute flagrant defiance of international law, disrespect for the principle of the inadmissibility of the conquest of land by force and circumvention of resolutions of international legitimacy and of the peace process that began in Madrid in 1991.

The international community's failure to put an end to Israel's occupation of Arab territory and to its continued flagrant violation of international law threatens peace in the Middle East and throughout the world. The international community is aware that desired peace in the Middle East can be achieved only through Israel's full withdrawal from the occupied Golan, which lies at the heart of the peace process. No peace is possible without such a withdrawal.

Israel, instead of complying with the logic of justice and peace, has, since its occupation of the Syrian Arab Golan, used all the methods and means at its disposal to confiscate lands; forcibly to evict people from their lands, villages and cities, and from 244 farms; to adopt resolutions and laws to annex the Golan; and to impose its administrative and legal jurisdiction. It has done everything in its power to colonize the Golan Heights and to bring in settlers from all over the world — who have nothing to do with that occupied area — at the expense of the Syrian population, depriving it of fundamental freedoms and basic humanitarian rights.

Nearly 500,000 Syrian internally displaced persons are still waiting to return to their land and homes, in accordance with international resolutions. They and their descendants, fellow citizens and brethren will never forget their rights and their land, regardless of how long the occupation lasts or the exorbitant sacrifices they have made.

Israel has occupied 96 per cent of the Golan and has destroyed all facets of life there; it continues to encircle five Syrian villages, to seize land, to plant mines, to destroy the environment in the Golan, to uproot trees, to set forests ablaze, to move the soil, to bury chemical and nuclear waste and to steal water. Israel lays siege to the Syrians and prevents them from visiting their land; it imposes exorbitant taxes; it detains Syrians and coercively arrests them; it deprives them of medical treatment and closes educational institutions; it imposes Israeli decisions; it distorts all facts relating to the geography and history of the Golan, with a view to obliterating any sense of national belonging; and it deprives Syrian children of their history, heritage, culture and homeland.

President Bashar Al-Assad of the Syrian Arab Republic has indicated on numerous occasions that Syria extends a hand of peace and seeks to resume the peace process. At a recent conference of Syrian expatriates, he stated that Syria has on many occasions explained its stand vis-à-vis the peace process and has emphasized its serious desire to restore a just peace, in accordance with United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace. Syria has thus chosen peace as a strategic option for implementing resolutions of international legitimacy and has participated in serious and long negotiations. Recent statements made in the United States and in Israel about those negotiations testify to Syria's seriousness throughout the peace process and the negotiations.

However, Israel has hampered the peace process that proceeded from the Madrid Conference, by stubbornly continuing its occupation of the Arab territories on a range of flimsy pretexts and circumventing the peace process and its terms of reference. This situation results also from the failure of international Powers to meet their obligations towards the peace process and the implementation of international resolutions. It is regrettable that Syria's peace gestures have been met with nothing but rejection, manoeuvring and disregard from the Israeli side. Moreover, Israel has imposed impossible conditions to resume the peace process.

Since the international community has agreed by an overwhelming majority on sound bases for establishing a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East, why is peace still eluding us? Who is responsible for placing barriers in the way of peace? Which party is impeding the establishment of peace, wasting time, entrenching faits accomplis and perpetuating occupation? Which party is evading the serious steps that need to be taken towards a just and comprehensive peace? Which party fabricates pretexts and imposes impossible and unjust conditions to prevent any progress in the peace process with the participation of all parties to the conflict? Which party is trying fervently to annex occupied Arab territories, to colonize them and to change their cultural, demographic and natural characteristics? The answer to all those questions is easy and clear-cut.

On every occasion, the Arabs have affirmed that they their uphold justice and legitimacy. They have not demanded anything more than the implementation of United Nations resolutions relating to the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East as the basis for a solution.

What has Israel done? Israel has continuously refused to implement any United Nations resolutions, even those by virtue of which it became a Member of the United Nations. It has impeded the peace process and has annexed and colonized the occupied territories, paying little heed to the results of its destructive policies.

The United Nations has made considerable efforts to find a just resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It has adopted hundreds of resolutions, which Israel has rejected. That country has thus flagrantly defied the will of the international community; it has continued to occupy Arab territories in Palestine, Lebanon and Syria; it has escalated its military campaign, wreaking more havoc and murder against the Palestinian people. It has continued to violate the sovereignty of Lebanon, to launch threats against Syria, to escalate an already tense situation in the region, which would lead to collapse. What increases the bitterness of the situation experienced by Arab people everywhere is that everyone, inside and outside the region, has known that a certain party is always ready to take immediate action, even if it runs counter to international law and the United Nations Charter, when the matter relates to an Arab State. However, that party fails to take any action when the matter relates to Israel's practices, its blatant defiance of international law and United Nations resolutions and its continuous attempts to nip the peace process in the bud. These double standards have given rise to a sense of frustration, to the extent that many in the region and the world believe that Israel is a State above law and legitimacy.

On top of the explosive situation in the Middle East region, Israel holds a huge nuclear, chemical and biological arsenal; this constitutes another element in the instability in the Middle East and threatens the future of its peoples.

In contrast to that, Syria and all its sister Arab States have been in the forefront of States calling for making the Middle East a zone free of weapons of mass destruction. It has acted seriously to achieve that goal, including by submitting a draft resolution to the Security Council.

Time and again, Syria has expressed its desire to uphold a just and comprehensive peace and has endeavoured seriously to achieve it. We still believe

that peace can be achieved only by Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories — Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese — in conformity with international resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as the terms of reference of the Madrid peace conference, the principle of land for peace and the Arab peace initiative.

Peace is incompatible with occupation — and with any action that entrenches it. The Government of the Syrian Arab Republic calls upon the international community and its institutions to take all necessary measures to curb Israel, to prevent it from continuing the practices which threaten to escalate the already worsening situation in the region and to pressure it to resume the peace process, with a view to achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

The Acting President: I call now on the observer of Palestine.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): The situation in the Middle East remains a cause of grave concern for the entire international community. That region, the cradle of civilizations and a region of historical, geographic, religious and economic importance, continues to suffer from instability and war. This situation threatens to ignite cultural and religious confrontation.

The core problem in the Middle East is, of course, the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict. This issue is different from any other because of the unprecedented injustices inflicted upon an entire people and because of that people's ongoing suffering arising from the decades-long absence of a just solution to their plight. Stemming from this situation are other dimensions of the problem, such as the occupation of other Arab territories, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the continued escalation of tension and the rise of extremism. Yet the problems of the region do not end here. They are compounded by the situation in Iraq and many crises on the periphery of the Arab region, in addition to the failure of the march towards democratization and economic and social modernization.

All of that is appalling enough and has negative consequences for international peace and security. But worse still, the situation does not seem to be going in the right direction. Now, dangerous ideas, typically based on ideological visions, seem to control the Middle East policies and actions of major Powers. In order to put matters in the region on the right track, it is now crucial to identify and discuss these ideas with a view to putting an end to them and identifying correct ideas — ideas which could lead to the solution of the region's problems.

One of those dangerous ideas is that only a negotiated solution can resolve the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict. On its face, this seems to be reasonable, as negotiations are a fine thing. But a deeper look clearly reveals that the aim is to nullify the relevant provisions of international law, to neutralize the United Nations, particularly the organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security — the Security Council — and to make any solution subject to the imbalance of power between the occupier and the occupied.

We listened moments ago to an example cited by the Israeli representative. That same dangerous concept has recently developed a new dimension as a result of demands upon the Palestinian side to build democratic institutions and to clean house as a prerequisite for progress in the peace process. Once again, in principle, democratization is a fine thing. But this concept aims at changing the nature of the conflict from national liberation to an internal Palestinian matter. Of course, it also sets out the impossible mission of building State institutions while under foreign occupation.

The whole notion is nonsense. We must revert to the basics — adherence to international law and engagement by the international community and its institutions in defining, in a clear and binding manner, the broad parameters of a settlement — if we want to resolve the question of Palestine and achieve peace in the region.

Another dangerous idea is that there is an inherent cultural and religious divide between us and the West: that Arabs and Muslims hate the West, or specifically the United States, simply because of what the West is. That is also nonsense. But it is dangerous nonsense, and it is being used by certain forces to push towards a clash of civilizations and religions. The basic problem is a problem of policies, particularly those relating to the region and specifically to the question of Palestine and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Arabs and Muslims have seen enough of such policies to be convinced that forces are aligned against them, in breach of international justice, international law and

legitimacy. What is urgently needed today is serious reconsideration of these policies in order to change the prevailing situation.

Related to this is the attempt by those same forces to push for the acceleration of democratization and modernization in the region. Simply put, these attempts have not succeeded because, for the reasons stated above, those forces lack all credibility. Only when those policies are changed to conform with justice and law can credibility be restored. Only then can they contribute positively to the acceleration of democratization and modernization.

Another dangerous notion is that terrorism is a product of Islamic extremism and that it can be eliminated only by force. The phenomenon of terrorism is, of course, an old one, although the groups involved has changed over time: from radical leftist groups, to extremist nationalist groups to groups linked, to religious extremism. Even in the Middle East, this phenomenon did not start among Arab or Islamic groups.

With regard to religious extremism, which by its nature creates an environment conducive to the growth of terrorist groups, it is imperative to see the reality: the rise of religious extremism among the followers of the three monotheistic religions — not only among Muslims. It is a regrettable phenomenon, which feeds upon itself, particularly in the absence of a collective coming together based on the ideals of religious tolerance, dialogue and acceptance of the other.

Today, there are terrorist groups of extremist Muslims who have imposed their actions on the international agenda. But confronting this phenomenon should always be based on confronting both Islamic and non-Islamic extremism, and on distinguishing between Islam and the extremists who claim to represent it. The use of force may be essential to confront individual perpetrators. But a victory over the phenomenon cannot be achieved without dealing with the surrounding environment and without depriving extremists of the reasons they invoke in their mobilization and recruitment efforts. Once again, the issue here is one of policies: unjust and biased policies that are destroying the present and the future of millions of people, politically, economically and socially.

My comments should not be interpreted to mean that Arabs and Muslims are attempting to evade their responsibilities; those of us from the Middle East region, in particular, are aware of our responsibility to identify and resolve our problems. On the contrary, my comments indicate that an important part of the solution should come from the region itself and be implemented by the peoples of the region. However, they also make it clear that the forces involved in the region, whose policies in one way or another are the cause of many the problems there, have an enormous responsibility in this regard.

In conclusion, I should like once again to reiterate the centrality of the question of Palestine in the Middle East region — for war began in Palestine, and peace will begin in Palestine. At this time of grief over the loss of the leader of the Palestinian people, let us hope for peace in Palestine and in the region. That, however, will require a fundamental change in the Israeli position towards acceptance of and commitment to the two-State solution, based on the 1967 borders and the relevant provisions of international law — a solution that was long ago accepted by the Palestinian side. The role and responsibility of the international community in this regard remain essential. We trust that it will fulfil its responsibilities in that regard.

Finally, I would like to express our deep gratitude and appreciation, on behalf of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian leadership, to all those who have, from this rostrum, offered condolences on the loss of Yasser Arafat.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): The problem in the Middle East and Palestine is a problem created by the use of force and foreign military occupation in contravention of the Charter.

I would like to thank the Secretary-General for his reports under agenda items 36 and 37.

I should like to take this opportunity to reiterate our heartfelt condolences to the Palestinian people on the demise of their great leader, President Yasser Arafat. Yasser Arafat symbolized the legitimate struggle of the Palestinian people against foreign occupation and for statehood in their own homeland. Pakistan shares their grief. We also share their conviction that the vision for which Yasser Arafat struggled for so long will be achieved — sooner, rather than later.

The Palestinian people are at a fateful juncture in their national history. President Arafat's untimely

demise has created a political void, which we know will be filled quickly. The Palestinian people have responded maturely and sagaciously. They have taken the first firm steps in the political transition, in accordance with their basic law. Pakistan welcomes the decision of the Palestinian National Authority to hold elections on 9 January 2005. That will help to put Palestinian political life back on track and to enable them to carry the peace process forward.

The organization of elections under foreign occupation is a difficult, if not impossible, task — in Palestine, as elsewhere. The elections will be held against the background of death and destruction caused by incessant incursions, attacks and targeted assassinations of Palestinian political figures by the occupying Power. Such security threats to Palestinian lives have been aggravated by the economic and humanitarian restrictions imposed by the occupation forces, continuing illegal settlement activities and the construction of the separation wall by Israel. Organizing successful elections against this backdrop is a daunting challenge for the Palestinian Authority.

It is our responsibility — the responsibility of the international community — to uphold the Charter, to uphold international law. We must be involved in closely monitoring the response of the occupation forces to the Palestinian efforts to revive peace and to organize their own political transition. No interference in the electoral process should be tolerated. Gestures of conciliation from Israel should be transformed into concrete action; they should not remain mere words. The restrictions imposed in the occupied territories should be lifted to allow all Palestinians, including those in East Jerusalem, to participate in the Palestinian national elections.

If we want to see the incoming Palestinian political dispensation emerge as a credible partner in peace efforts, we will have to strengthen its capacity to deal with internal and external security and humanitarian and economic challenges. The Palestinian Authority should not be simultaneously attacked by the occupation forces and exposed to demands to take actions against violence emanating from the occupied territories. The Palestinian Authority will need to be reassured by the international community and by the occupation forces of their commitment to peace on the basis of the two-State solution. It is only thus that hope will be revived among the Palestinian people. To that end, Pakistan proposes that several actions need to be taken.

First, Israel should immediately release all political prisoners, enabling them to participate in the political process. Secondly, in coordination with the United Nations, Israel should take concrete steps to improve the humanitarian conditions in the occupied territories and to respect scrupulously international humanitarian law. Thirdly, Israel should immediately suspend its settlement activities. Fourthly, the Palestinian territories in Gaza and the West Bank must be treated as a single territorial unit where, in accordance with the road map, a Palestinian State will have to be established. In that context, the Gaza disengagement plan must be a first step towards a full end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Fifthly, Israel should also respond to the calls for movement on the Syrian-Lebanese peace track and to the initiatives taken by the President of Syria.

Those actions and affirmations are essential for a credible revival of the peace process. We trust that the Quartet will call for such actions and assurances from Israel. We trust that the General Assembly will also take similar decisions.

We must carefully consider the short- and long-term implications of the continuation of occupation and conflict in the Middle East and Palestine. As the President of Pakistan observed in the General Assembly, "the tragedy of Palestine is an open wound inflicted on the psyche of every Muslim" (*A/59/PV.5, 21*). We must not allow that wound to continue to fester. The vision of the two States, Palestine and Israel, living side by side in peace and security must be fostered and protected. A fair solution to the Palestinian issue is essential to restoring amity across regions and cultures and to avoiding an iron curtain descending between the Islamic world and those who blindly support Israel's illegal occupation and suppression of the Palestinian people.

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): Since the end of the Second World War, the Middle East has suffered from devastating wars and endless cycles of violence, tension and instability as a result of the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, which would have been prevented if Israel had not been established in 1948. Since then, Israel has continued to occupy and confiscate the lands and resources of the Arab and Palestinian population. It has used its

military power to kill and replace the legitimate Arab and Palestinian population with millions of Jewish immigrants from all over the world.

Despite the successful efforts and accomplishments of the United Nations in the area of decolonization and in assisting peoples to exercise their national right to self-determination and independence, including through the adoption of approximately 40 resolutions by the Security Council and more than 600 resolutions by the General Assembly, the question of the Middle East in all its aspects remains unsolved. That is due to Israel's ongoing disregard of the principals of international humanitarian law and instruments, international legitimacy and the principles of the Charter, deepening the feelings of oppression, despair and frustration not only among the population of the occupied territories, but also within the countries of the region and other peace-loving countries.

While the United Arab Emirates considers the Palestinian question to be at the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, it believes that a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the conflict requires the international community, and especially the Security Council and the members of the Quartet, to demonstrate the required political will in order to take effective international measures to ensure the full and unconditional withdrawal of Israel from all Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967, including al-Quds al-Sharif, the Syrian Golan Heights and the Shaba'a Farms, and to put an immediate end to the oppressive and violent acts and massacres committed daily against women, children and the elderly before the very eyes of the international community. In that context, we affirm the importance of the following.

First, the international community must condemn the illegitimate settlement schemes undertaken by the Israeli Government in the Arab and Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan, and demand that Israel immediately remove those settlements.

Secondly, a mechanism must be developed to monitor Israel's compliance with its legal obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, which is applicable to the Arab and Palestinian occupied territories, including Al-Quds Al-Sharif, the Syrian Golan Heights and Shaba'a Farms, and its abidance by the decision of the International Court of Justice, issued on 9 July 2004, calling upon Israel to refrain from pursuing the construction of the separation wall in the West Bank and Jerusalem due to its illegality and its harmful effect on the livelihood of the Palestinian people and their plans to establish an independent State.

Thirdly, the international community must emphasize yet again the illegality and invalidity of all the legal, administrative and judicial measures imposed by Israel on Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the Syrian Golan Heights to change their Arab identity. It is imperative that the international community demand that Israel rescind all such measures and call on all countries to refrain from transferring their diplomatic missions to Jerusalem and from changing the structural, demographical, institutional and legal status of the occupied Golan since under occupation such changes are null and void pursuant to relevant Security Council resolutions, such as resolutions 478 (1980) and 497 (1981).

Fourthly, the Quartet must be urged to take serious steps to ensure Israel's commitment to resuming negotiations and to timely and strict implementation of the requirements of the road map, including the declaration of a Palestinian State by the end of 2005 on the basis of the borders of 1967, and in accordance with international law and international legitimacy. We also affirm the importance of expanding the road map to include the Lebanese and Syrian tracks.

Fifthly, Israel must cease its consistent air, land and sea violations of Lebanese sovereignty and cooperate in the disclosure of all landmine maps pertaining to Southern Lebanon. Israel must also respect the Lebanese national will and its right to control its territorial waters in accordance with international law.

In conclusion, we affirm that the Arab-Israeli conflict can be settled and peace, security, stability and economic and commercial cooperation between the two sides established only through a comprehensive peace process based on the road map, the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab peace initiative adopted at the Beirut summit in 2002. That will ensure the return of the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories and their natural resources to their legitimate owners, the Arab and Palestinian peoples. It will also enable the Palestinian people to realize their inalienable rights,

including their rights to freedom, to self-determination and to the establishment of their own independent State of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Assaf (Lebanon) *(spoke in Arabic)*: We are meeting here once again in the General Assembly in order to discuss the situation in the Middle East, just as we have done every year since 1947.

I need hardly recall here that the reason why this crisis continues is the ongoing Israeli occupation of the occupied Arab territories. In Palestine, Israel has occupied the Gaza Strip and the West Bank — about 6,000 square kilometres — since 1967. It has managed to break up the occupied territories and has deprived the Palestinians of their inalienable right to self-determination and political independence. It has also deprived refugees of their right of return.

The Palestinians have lost about 78 per cent of their historical territory, yet Israel continues to refuse to withdraw from what little is left of that territory, using all kinds of pitiful excuses — arguing, for instance, that the land is not occupied, it is just "disputed".

I should like here to remind the Assembly of what the Ambassador of Yemen said yesterday: that Israel occupies land today and will say tomorrow that this is just "disputed" territory. The fact remains that Israel is an occupying Power, and that is how that country is defined in the United Nations.

In Syria, Israel has been occupying the Golan since 1967 — some 1,000 square kilometres. Approximately half a million inhabitants of the Golan have been displaced. Forty-four settlement colonies, inhabited by 20,000 settlers, have been set up. Israel inflicts many forms of abuse upon the approximately 25,000 remaining inhabitants of the Golan and tries to impose Israeli identity on them by force. All of this is, of course, a violation of Security Council resolution 497 (1981), which states that the law annexing the Golan was null and void.

In Lebanon, Israeli aggression continues unabated. Israel continues to occupy certain Lebanese territories, and still has Lebanese detainees. It has failed to give back about 20 per cent of the landmine maps to help locate the 400,000 landmines that have been planted in Lebanon — mines which take a terrible toll on hundreds of people of the area and which prevent farmers from cultivating their land.

Israel, in addition to all those abuses, continues to violate Lebanese sovereignty on an ongoing basis. Its military aircraft penetrate Lebanese airspace almost daily, flying at supersonic speeds over inhabited towns and cities in order to terrify civilians and, I might add, foreign tourists.

Israel has not responded to United Nations appeals to put an end to its violations, which the Secretary-General has termed "provocations". Security Council resolution 1553 (2004) refers to the continuous nature of such violations.

The disastrous situation in the Middle East can be brought to an end only if Israel can be convinced to implement the relevant United Nations resolutions and to withdraw from occupied Arab territories. In the context of the Arab peace initiative adopted at Beirut in 2002, the Arab nations have offered Israel peace, recognition as a State of the region, and normal relations with it. However, Israel rejected the Arab initiative.

As for us, we continue to await the day when the Arab peace initiative finally meets with a positive response by Israel, because only then can we say that peace is at hand — once there is a genuine desire to build peace.

Mr. Maurer (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): The context of the Middle East conflict today is one of change. The international community has just shown its solidarity with the Palestinian people in mourning the loss of Yasser Arafat, the first elected President of the Palestinian Authority. The image of that statesman being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994 together with Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres will forever symbolise the hopes that were pinned on the Oslo peace process at the time.

Those hopes have yet to be realized. In recent years the escalating violence has continued to claim innocent lives among the Palestinian and Israeli people. The economic, social and humanitarian situation is still deteriorating in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The Palestinian Authority has called a presidential election for 9 January 2005. This is a crucial step for firmly establishing democracy in institutions and for the legitimacy of the future president of the Authority. It is therefore all the more important that the elections conform to international

standards. We call on the Israeli Government, but also on the Palestinian Authority, to take all necessary measures so that Palestinians can go to the polls without restrictions. Switzerland is willing to provide support not only for the presidential election but also for the legislative and local elections that will take place in 2005.

The presidential election and the establishment of the new Palestinian team create an opportunity to resume negotiations on the final permanent status of a future Palestinian State. Confidence-building measures need to be taken on both sides, and promptly. The Palestinian Authority should do everything in its power to combat terrorism, which no cause can justify. But it is equally important that the daily suffering that the Palestinian people endure as a result of the occupation be rapidly and significantly alleviated. Strict respect for international humanitarian law by both parties is an absolute requirement.

Israel has a fundamental right to protect its people from terrorism. However, disproportionate use of armed force only serves to exacerbate the vicious circle of violence. Building new settlements in the occupied territory despite the commitments set out in the road map breaches the rules of international law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention, and is a major obstacle to peace. In its advisory opinion published on 9 July 2004, the International Court of Justice in The Hague confirmed that the Fourth Geneva Convention is applicable in the occupied Palestinian territory. It also confirmed that the building of a separation wall in the West Bank, encroaching on territory occupied since 1967, is contrary to international law.

On 20 July 2004, the General Assembly mandated Switzerland, as the depositary State of the Geneva Conventions, to conduct consultations on the matter. My country will in due course inform the Assembly of the results of the consultations it is holding at the moment with all interested parties.

The Israeli parliament recently approved a plan for military withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and removal of all settlements there, as well as the dismantling of four settlements in the northern part of the West Bank. Switzerland favours the principle behind this plan, which could make a positive contribution to the peace process if the following conditions are met.

First, this withdrawal should be coordinated and be implemented with the support of the Palestinian Authority and of the other parties concerned, particularly the Egyptian Government and representatives of the Quartet. Secondly, it should not result in a transfer of residents to one or several Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Thirdly, it would be appropriate for Israel to facilitate the reconstruction of Gaza following its complete withdrawal from this territory, which has been occupied since 1967. Finally, it should be understood as a stage in the implementation of the Quartet's road map.

As for military withdrawal from part of the occupied territory, it does not in itself constitute the end of the occupation if the occupying Power maintains security control by other means, particularly by encirclement or by military control of the air space.

Withdrawal from Gaza makes sense only if it is part of a comprehensive vision that can satisfy the legitimate aspirations of both peoples: Israeli and Palestinian. The 2002 Arab League peace plan makes such a vision possible. The Quartet's road map has marked out a feasible path for the resumption of the peace process. A year ago almost to the day, on 1 December 2003, the Geneva initiative was launched. It is a courageous appeal by Israeli and Palestinian civil society that clearly sets out the parameters of such a comprehensive vision and that has therefore become an invaluable point of reference.

A new constellation is emerging in the Middle East. The international community should encourage the parties to the conflict to seize the opportunity to resume negotiations. It is essential that all interested parties, whether or not they hold official positions, set about this task and invest all their determination, intelligence and courage to achieve the vision of two States, Israel and the future Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security.

Mr. Rastam (Malaysia): The situation in the Middle East remains precarious and volatile. Events in the region continue to unfold with a high degree of uncertainty, posing a serious threat to international peace and security. My delegation profoundly regrets that after 34 years, the situation in the Middle East remains on the agenda of the General Assembly without a solution clearly in sight. Nevertheless, my delegation sees a glimmer of hope. It is important that the international community works toward energizing

that glimmer into a bright shining light of peace, freedom and dignity for all affected peoples in the region. We call upon those who have the most influence to work seriously towards establishing enduring peace and security in the Middle East.

The question concerning Palestine remains central to regional tension and peace and security concerns in the Middle East. Malaysia has made known its position on this question on several occasions, including during debates in the plenary and in various Committees at the current Assembly session, most recently during the debate in the plenary on agenda item 37, the question of Palestine, yesterday, 29 November 2004.

We are all too familiar with the details and characteristics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We have been exposed to far too many accounts of the atrocities committed by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian population. We have witnessed how the collective desire of the international community for peace and security in the region has been repeatedly thwarted, primarily because of Israel's intransigence and arrogance and its refusal to faithfully implement its obligations under various peace accords and initiatives.

The key to peace and security in the region lies in the complete end to Israeli occupation and annexation of Palestinian territory, which would result in the establishment of an independent and sovereign State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Efforts must be deployed in earnest to create the conditions towards realising the two-State solution as envisaged in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002). We have an unambiguous road map to reach this destination in 2005.

Many appear to agree that the current situation offers a great opportunity for the peace process to be put back on track. Malaysia welcomes the intentions of all parties concerned to revive the road map, which, in our view, still constitutes a workable platform for achieving comprehensive and durable peace. But the revival of the road map still depends on Israel's willingness to cooperate in many areas, the first of which is to ensure, as the occupying Power, that the Palestinian presidential election can proceed in January 2005 in a calm, secure and peaceful environment. Yesterday, the Israeli Permanent Representative gave the assurance in this Assembly that Israel would do so. He also said that Israel respected the Palestinian people. Let us hope that as a genuine show of respect and humanitarian concern, Israel would immediately cease its oppression and inhumane treatment of the Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory.

The new Palestinian leadership that has emerged following the passing of the late President Yasser Arafat and following the elections to come can surely count on Malaysia's support in their struggle towards the establishment of a viable, sovereign and independent State of Palestine. We will support them in their efforts to come to the negotiating table. We urge the international community also to support them. The current deplorable situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and the suffering of the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation cannot be allowed to continue longer. We call on the Quartet to seize on the current opportunity to work towards peace and a just, comprehensive and lasting solution to this burning question.

Despite numerous General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the question concerning the occupied Syrian Golan remains unresolved. Malaysia reaffirms its view that all measures and actions already taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, that purport to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan and its institutional structure, as well as the measures by Israel to apply its jurisdiction and administration in the area, are illegal.

All such measures and actions since 1967, including the construction of Israeli settlements and Israeli activities in the area, constitute a flagrant violation of international law as well as the Charter and relevant resolutions of the United Nations. Israel must withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967 in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1968), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981). Israel must also adhere to the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference of 1991.

Malaysia fully supports and maintains its solidarity with the Syrian Arab Republic in asserting its legitimate demand and rights to restore its full sovereignty over the occupied Syrian Golan on the basis of the terms of reference of the Arab peace initiative, the Madrid peace process, the relevant Security Council resolutions, as well as the principle of land for peace.

Malaysia maintains that Israel must respect all commitments and pledges it entered into with the aim of laying down the basis for substantive progress on the Syrian-Israeli track. In that connection, Malaysia commends the Syrian Arab Republic for its preparedness to return to the negotiating table, without preconditions, with Israel. It would only be sensible and rational if Israel were to do likewise.

The third factor in the Arab-Israeli conflict concerns Lebanon. Malaysia reaffirms the legitimate right of Lebanon to defend its territories and to liberate the remaining parts of its territories under Israeli occupation. My delegation has noted with great interest the numerous submissions made by the Government of Lebanon to the Security Council and the Secretary-General concerning the frequent threats, aggression and violations by Israel concerning the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Lebanon and its natural resources. Malaysia supports Lebanon's demand that Israel put an end immediately to all such acts, in accordance with the United Nations Charter.

The United Nations, in particular the Security Council, has a crucial role and responsibility in bringing a conclusion to the Israeli-Lebanese conflict. Malaysia believes that the presence of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) continues to be pivotal in ensuring that peace and security prevail in the area. Repeated Israeli violations of the Blue Line and Lebanese sovereign territory pose serious risks of deterioration in the situation.

The removal of landmines planted by Israel during its occupation of southern Lebanon should be expedited with the continued assistance of the international community. Similarly, the international community should work towards ensuring the release of all Lebanese who are being detained by Israel in defiance of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 and its relevant Protocols.

Faced with these outstanding issues, it would only be sensible and rational if both parties were to engage in diplomatic efforts and constructive dialogue to defuse the tension between them and create confidence-building measures following the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978) and the establishment of the Blue Line.

Malaysia remains particularly concerned over the situation in Iraq, which continues to have serious international and regional implications. Discontent over Iraq could create further complications in many countries. It could widen the gap and deepen the differences between the Muslim world and the West and may well swell the ranks of the discontented in the Muslim world, especially when attention is drawn to Iraq while the oppression suffered by the Palestinian people continues to be ignored.

Unfortunately, such a situation will only afford extremist elements the opportunity and a convenient excuse to mobilize support for their militant causes. We have clearly seen this happening in the last few months. The international community must act to ensure that peace and stability are restored in Iraq.

The widespread insecurity and violence in Iraq form the greatest impediment to a successful transition process. Restoring peace and security expeditiously is critical. The Iraqi authorities have the right, indeed the duty, to maintain law and order throughout their territory and to return normalcy to Iraq. They must identify and implement measures, with the assistance of the international community, to prevail upon all perpetrators of acts of violence in Iraq, be they Iraqis or non-Iraqis, on the basis of applicable national and international laws. The security of Iraq must be the sole responsibility of an independent and sovereign Iraq. Those are the key variables to allow the commencement of a comprehensive and sustained nation-building and reconstruction process in Iraq.

My delegation underlines the importance of winning the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people. They must be convinced that foreign forces will leave within an early and clear timeline and that peace and security will ensue. They must be convinced that their freedom and independence will be assured. They must also be convinced that the United Nations and the international community will assist them in fulfilling their hopes and aspirations for a better future.

All acts of excessive and indiscriminate use of force by any party against innocent civilians, as well as private and public property and institutions, must be avoided, lest the confidence of the Iraqi people be eroded. All acts of religious and cultural insensitivities, such as the desecration of places of worship, holy sites and other places of religious significance, under whatever pretext, must be stopped and the sanctity of those holy places should be maintained and respected at all times.

Malaysia reiterates its call for all States to respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq in accordance with the United Nations Charter and international law. We believe that the United Nations should be given the central role in Iraq in helping to create the environment necessary for the conduct of elections scheduled on 30 January 2005. The orderly conduct of free and fair elections, premised on transparency and inclusiveness and involving all segments of Iraqi society, is critical to the process of establishing a truly independent, fully representative and sovereign Government in Iraq.

The United Nations also has the best credentials to create the right conditions to enable Member States to take part in peacebuilding and reconstruction in Iraq. If the international community could collectively succeed in assisting Iraq to seize the moment, we would also succeed at the same time in bringing to closure the bitter divisiveness brought about by earlier actions over this question. The war had been won, but we must make sure that we can win the peace. Let us work together to not disappoint the Iraqi people.

Given the unsettled and dangerous situation in the Middle East, my delegation remains committed to encouraging peaceful solutions to the multifaceted and complex problems faced by the region. We urge the parties concerned to seek a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 497 (1981), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003); the Madrid terms of reference; the principle of land for peace; the Arab peace initiative and implementation of all existing agreements between the parties aimed at comprehensive peace in the Middle East on all tracks, including the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks. We urge Israel, in its own best interests, to look beyond its immediate security needs, important as they may be, and to begin in earnest to engage its Arab neighbours in serious and meaningful dialogue towards the early realization of comprehensive peace.

We reiterate our call for the early restoration of the independence and sovereignty of Iraq, as envisaged in Security Council resolution 1546 (2004). Malaysia has expressed its preparedness to participate in building a new Iraq under the auspices of the United Nations. We hope that this opportunity will arrive sooner rather than later.

Mr. Al-Jomae (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today, the General Assembly is discussing agenda item 36, entitled "The situation in the Middle East". Everyone knows that the situation in the Middle East, during the past year, has deteriorated further, owing to the Israeli policies being carried out in Palestine against the unarmed Palestinian people. Such policies have exposed to the world the reality of State terrorism as practised by Israel.

Furthermore, the extremism witnessed by the capitals of the region and the world is also the result of such Israeli practices. Israeli policies have increased tension and exacerbated the confrontation between the Arabs and the Israelis, particularly since Israel has completely disregarded the Palestinians' and international community's calls for resumption of the peace process.

The international community recognizes that the question of Palestine is the crux of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Everyone knows that the Israeli occupation of Palestine has had negative consequences on the region. There is the issue of the Palestinian refugees currently living in Arab countries. The true solution to this problem lies in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948; that resolution stresses the right of refugees to repatriation to their own homes and land and to compensation for those who wish not to return. Israel continues to occupy other Arab territories; in addition to the Palestinian territories and Jerusalem, it continues to occupy the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon. At the same time, it persists in violating international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. Therefore, we would like to stress the necessity of a complete Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan and the implementation of Security Council resolution 242 (1967). We would also stress the need for Israel to withdraw from Lebanese territories, in accordance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978), without conditions.

Israel insists on possessing nuclear capabilities and refuses to accede to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or to subject its nuclear installations to the comprehensive safeguards regime of the International Atomic Energy Association, thus placing the security of the entire region in an extremely dangerous position. Everyone realizes that this dangerous Israeli stance could possibly lead to total destruction of the region — God forbid — in case of any abuse of such weapons. Therefore, the Kingdom of

Saudi Arabia would like to call upon the international community to do its utmost to oblige Israel to accede to the NPT.

The success of any international efforts to solve the question of the Middle East and the question of Palestine lies mostly in reconsideration of policies and positions taken by the parties to the conflict and their partners. It also lies in full respect for the truth; in complete respect for international legitimacy; in putting an end to the occupation of Arab and Palestinian territories and to the problem of refugees; and in giving the Palestinian people their complete rights, including the right to establish their own independent, sovereign State, with al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital.

Mr. Cengizer (Turkey): Turkey has aligned itself with the statements made on behalf of the European Union under agenda items 36 and 37 entitled "The situation in the Middle East" and "Question of Palestine", respectively. I would like to further elaborate on our views at this critical juncture.

The Middle East is currently undergoing a period that demands the focused attention of the international community. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is passing through a stage warranting such attention. In the last four years, the international community has witnessed violence, destruction and despair, thus subjugating the true wishes and hopes of the peoples of the region for lasting peace and security. Terrorism and excessive and indiscriminate use of force in the form of reprisals have only brought suffering and devastation, wreaking a heavy toll on the innocent and helpless.

Both parties have paid dearly for their hardened positions. The unrelenting cycle of violence has eroded prospects for the establishment of a Palestinian State within the desired time frame, and the policies of Israel have not yet delivered the sense of security it rightfully seeks. Hence, many of the benefits of progress seen through the Madrid and Oslo processes have been lost, to the detriment of both parties.

Despite this grim picture, the elections for the Palestinian presidency might initiate a much-needed impetus, energizing efforts to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict by facilitating the resumption of a genuine political process. As a first task, we believe that the international community should encourage and assist the Palestinians so as to enable the holding of the elections as planned.

We also deem it necessary that during the period leading up to the elections, Israel should try to facilitate the successful completion of the election process in the Palestinian territories.

At this point, the road map remains the most important document that can break the current stalemate between Israel and the Palestinians. The peace plan devised by the Quartet clearly spells out the respective obligations of both sides. All members of the Quartet, along with the international community, should exert every effort possible for the implementation of that plan, in cooperation with the parties concerned.

In this context, we would also like to stress, once again, our misgivings about the ongoing construction of the separation wall in the West Bank. The so-called barrier, cutting deep into Palestinian territories in the West Bank, has been punishing the Palestinians, further degrading their condition. To achieve normalization on the ground, the Advisory Opinion rendered by the International Court of Justice this past July should be taken into account. Furthermore, the barrier can in no way be regarded as a means for prejudging the final negotiations on the borders of Palestine.

Likewise, the unilateral initiative of the Israeli Government to disengage from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank has the potential to be counter-productive, unless it is planned and implemented carefully and in coordination with the Palestinians and in accordance with the road map. Only a full and complete withdrawal from the Gaza Strip that would also lead to the end of occupation of the West Bank could pave the way for an independent and sovereign Palestinian State.

Another challenge before the international community is the coordination of the numerous steps that lie ahead of us. It is crucial to sustain support for reforms in the Palestinian Authority, which will eventually form the administrative and institutional structure of the future Palestinian State. For its part, Turkey launched an action plan at the end of 2003 to increase and diversify its assistance to the Palestinian people. This year, we have started implementing this plan in the areas of health; technical and vocational education; and food, financial and humanitarian aid under the supervision of a Government-appointed coordinator.

The United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), as well as the principle of "land for peace", constitute the pillars for a negotiated, just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the conflict in the Middle East. It will only be through adherence to the principles within that framework that the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security within recognized and secure borders can be realized.

Turkey supports all international efforts aimed at the settlement of the Middle East question. We stand ready to contribute, in every possible way, to efforts geared at the revitalization of the stalled peace process and we maintain our close contacts and cooperation with all concerned parties.

In addition to the revival of talks between Israel and the Palestinians, the potential impact of other tracks on achieving the desired peace in the region should not be overlooked. The Syrian and Lebanese tracks also await the attention of the international community in order to create a peaceful, secure, enlightened and prosperous environment for the peoples of the Middle East.

Mr. Denisov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): A year has past since the time when the General Assembly in this very Hall discussed the events taking place in the Middle East. The past months have been difficult and complex as far as efforts to achieve peace in that region are concerned. At times it seemed that the parties to the Middle East conflict were no longer guided by the logic of negotiations, mutual concessions and a quest for compromise. Diplomacy was replaced by the tactics of unilateral measures, violence, terrorist acts and the use of force accompanied by numerous victims among the civilian populations, both in Israel and in the Palestinian territories.

Just a few weeks ago, the head of the Palestinian National Authority, Yasser Arafat, passed away. He was a person who had devoted his entire life to attaining one goal: the independence of Palestine and the creation of a Palestinian State. I would like to take this opportunity once again to express from this rostrum our condolences to the people of Palestine on the demise of their leader. Now, Palestinians must accomplish Yasser Arafat's lifelong mission, which is the full realization of the right of the people of Palestine to self-determination.

To be sure, that is no mean feat. However, underpinnings for success in that area do exist. Russia wishes every success to the new leadership of the Palestinian administration and stands ready to provide it with all possible assistance and support. We hope that the Palestinian Administration will be able to ensure stability in its territories and prevent new outbursts of violence by radical and extremist groups.

On 23 November of this year, the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, Mr. Lavrov, paid a visit to the Palestinian territories. During a discussion with the Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Mr. Mahmoud Abbas, Mr. Lavrov voiced our support for the intention of the Palestinian authorities to organize general elections for the post of head of the Palestinian National Authority on 9 January 2005, to conduct democratic reforms and to combat terrorism and incitement to terrorist acts with determination. Our Foreign Minister stated that Russia, together with its partners in the Quartet, would take all necessary measures to help organize the voting process for Palestinians that would include residents of East Jerusalem, as well as helping to provide assistance in organizing international observation for the elections to be held in January in the Palestinian territories.

Success on the Israeli-Palestinian track will largely hinge on the willingness of Israel to take steps to assist the new Palestinian Authority. A number of steps have already been taken by Israel, including their stated willingness to facilitate the elections. However, assistance must not be confined to that alone. Israel must take into account the other concerns of Palestinians and must refrain from any steps that could complicate prospects for the resumption of full-fledged dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians. That was discussed during the most recent negotiations between the Foreign Minister of Russia, Lavrov, and the Foreign Minister of Israel, Silvan Shalom. During that conversation, the Russian Minister emphasized the importance of Israel coordinating its withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank with the Palestinians.

We hope that, after the elections in the Palestinian territories, the two parties will sit down at the negotiating table in order to resolve the still outstanding issues in their bilateral relations. Those issues are numerous and are very complex, but they must be resolved jointly. The international community is now intent on helping Israel and the Palestinians to overcome the problems that have accumulated between

them in recent years. There are mechanisms that exist, such as the Quartet and the road map that it has drafted and which was approved by the United Nations. For a long period of time the Quartet did not have the ability to have any real impact on the events on the Palestinian-Israeli track.

But without the restraining effect it provided the peace process would have gotten stuck in complete gridlock. Now, the international intermediaries have the opportunity to take practical steps and provide monitoring for the implementation of the road map as well as to help both the Palestinians and the Israelis to keep moving in parallel with regard to the steps that they need to take with respect to this document.

On 23 November 2004 there was a ministerial-level meeting of the Quartet in Sharm el-Sheikh, where these issues were discussed. This meeting confirmed that Russia, for its part, would continue its efforts to implement the road map, which calls for the establishment of an independent Palestinian State that would coexist in peace and security with Israel.

Clearly, resolving the Middle Eastern conflict is not just limited to the Palestinian-Israeli issues. For many years, we have not heard much good news about Israeli-Syrian or Israeli-Lebanese sectors, which are undeservedly blocked by what is happening between Israel and the Palestinians. Nonetheless, recent reports coming from the Israeli-Lebanese border are quite alarming and the international community must try to prevent an escalation of tension in this area. We are convinced of the importance of the resumption of Israeli-Syrian contacts. This step could radically improve the situation throughout the Middle East region.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that this process has now been given a new opportunity to extricate itself from the current impasse. It would be unforgivable of the international community to let this opportunity slip through its fingers.

Mr. López Clemente (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Once again, the General Assembly is debating this agenda item at a time of unfortunate stalemate. No relevant progress is perceived. There is no negotiation process of any importance and sporadic violence continues. Nor is there any evidence of a serious and constructive dialogue aimed at achieving a just and lasting peace that serves the genuine interests of all the peoples in the Middle East region, and thus, of all humanity.

The vicious circle of violence and retaliation persists. Political tensions continue to be aggravated. The number of dead and wounded people continues to increase, the majority innocent civilians, with a considerable proportion of children. Tens of thousands of families live in precarious conditions, under the constant threat of death and destruction, grieving for the death of their beloved ones not knowing whether a child who has gone to school or a worker gone to work will ever return home.

We are certain about something: violence, destruction and the use of military force will never lead to the peaceful settlement of a conflict such as that in the Middle East. Fifty-seven years ago, this Assembly adopted resolution 181 (II), which acknowledged the partition and supported the establishment of two independent States, one Arab and the other Jewish, to live side by side in peace and harmony. This resolution continues to be partially implemented. The State of Israel was created in 1948, but the Palestinian State has not yet been founded.

The scenario before us continues to be devastating. The illegal occupation by Israel of Arab territories in Palestine, Syria and Lebanon continues to flagrantly violate the demand expressed in a great number of resolutions adopted by this Assembly and by the Security Council that these territories be returned.

The inalienable right of the Palestinian people to their self-determination and the establishment of their own independent and sovereign State, with its capital in East Jerusalem, has still not been recognized.

Illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Arab territories, especially in the West Bank and in the surroundings of East Jerusalem, continue to expand, despite the appeals of the international community that an end be put to the creation of new settlements, land confiscations and the construction of the separation wall and its ensuing regime, which was declared contrary to international law in the Advisory Opinion issued by the International Court of Justice last July.

The situation of the more than four million Palestinian refugees, both within and outside the occupied territories, has still not been settled in a just and definitive manner.

The threat of military escalation in the region remains latent and cannot be dismissed, as long as there are a great number of foreign forces in the surroundings and the norms of good neighbourliness and pacific coexistence among nations are not being respected.

Our Organization is approaching its 60th anniversary, and the solution to one of the most difficult and complex tasks it has had since its creation is still pending. It is truly a shame that the Security Council remains hostage to the whims of a Power exercising the veto or threatening to wield the veto in order to hinder the exercise of the mandates within its own resolutions.

To achieve a broad, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, a final and peaceful settlement of the Palestinian question is necessary, without disregarding the progress necessary on the Syrian and Lebanese fronts.

I would like to remind you of the need to implement fully all the resolutions adopted by the Security Council and the General Assembly on the situation in the Middle East, without exception or discrimination, especially resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) of the Council.

Likewise, the concept reflected in the preamble of Security Council resolution 1397 (2002) clearly supports the existence in the Middle East region of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized boundaries.

The occupation of the Palestinian territories of the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan Heights and the areas of Southern Lebanon, still controlled by the Israeli Army, must be put to an end. The United Nations must play an effective and genuinely unbiased role in any negotiation process in the region, without any interference unacceptable to the parties, in order to restore the trust in those acting as mediators.

We should move towards implementing more incisive measures in the field. One might be the deployment of an international force under a United Nations mandate to protect the Palestinian civilian population and to contribute to undertake broad and constructive negotiations in an atmosphere of peace and mutual trust.

In this necessary and urgent effort, Cuba offers its habitual constructive assistance support in solidarity to the United Nations and the international community.

The delegation of Cuba summons Members to vote in favour of both draft resolutions under this item, the main goal of which is to bring about peace in the Middle East. This can only be achieved through understanding and not through confrontation.

Mr. Tierney (Australia): Last year when Australia spoke under this item, we had many grave concerns over the situation in the Middle East. One year later we deeply regret we have not seen the changes we had hoped for. As the grim Israeli-Palestinian dispute grinds on, the Middle East continues to experience the evils of terrorism. Such appalling acts as the bomb attack against Israeli holiday-makers in Egypt have been rightly condemned by Governments around the world and here in the United Nations. It remains imperative that we work together decisively to eradicate this scourge.

The Australian Government has expressed its condolences to the Palestinian people on the death of Mr. Yasser Arafat. A fitting tribute to Mr. Arafat would be the establishment of a Palestinian State living in peace, security and prosperity alongside Israel. To that end we all must now work, with a sense of renewed energy and commitment. If we do not, the lives and hopes of the people of the region will be further degraded, not least by the continuing growth of extremism and terrorism. It is incumbent on all of us to help the parties to the dispute to seize the opportunity to move forward that has been presented by the change in political leadership among the Palestinians.

The road map to Middle East peace provides the way forward. Its implementation has been delayed and many of its timelines have already passed, but it offers the best hope for the peace we need. Australia will continue to urge the parties to meet their commitments, clearly outlined in the road map, and to establish the sense of mutual trust and confidence necessary for progress. We will continue to speak out for the patient and sustained negotiations needed to resolve the issues that have so long divided the Israeli and Palestinian people. The Australian Government stands ready to offer a tangible contribution to moving the process forward towards the outcomes that we all seek.

Australia, together with its Coalition partners, remains firmly committed to the stabilization and

rehabilitation of Iraq, despite the actions of insurgents who are seeking to destroy the Iraqi people's hopes for peace, stability and economic growth. We congratulate the Iraqi Interim Government on its steadfast progress towards democratic rule. We encourage the international community to support the Iraqis as they seek to create freedom and prosperity, and we welcome the support expressed for Iraq at the Sharm el-Sheikh conference. We urge all nations to support the 30 January 2005 elections, which will provide the opportunity for Iraqis to elect — freely and fairly — the Government of their choice. Australia will not falter in its support and assistance to Iraq as it journeys towards a stable democracy governed by the rule of law.

As a member of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Australia has worked and will continue to work constructively in support of international efforts to resolve outstanding questions about Iran's nuclear activities.

The situation in the Middle East today remains a major challenge for its leaders and the wider international community. But we should not see terrorist acts and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and other calamities as insurmountable problems. Now more than ever, it is vital that the international community and the United Nations work together to overcome the destructive forces in the Middle East and to build a better future for all its peoples.

Ms. Martina (Ukraine): At the outset I wish to express once again, on behalf of the Government and the people of Ukraine, our most heart-felt condolences and sympathy to the Palestinian people on the passing away of Mr. Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian Authority and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization. He was always known and respected in Ukraine as the symbol of the national aspirations of the Palestinian people and as the leader who dedicated his entire life to the cause of the realization of the inalienable rights of his people, including to self-determination and statehood.

In expressing our solidarity with the Palestinian people at this difficult moment, we hope that they will remain united in pursuing the path towards achieving peace in the Middle East. We are encouraged by the first steps taken by the Palestinian leadership to ensure the smooth transition of power and prevent the situation from escalating to the point of internal unrest. The holding of free and fair presidential elections in the occupied Palestinian territories in January next year is the issue of utmost priority. We call on Israel to take the necessary steps to facilitate the elections and on the international community to provide the assistance needed.

Developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during the past year unfortunately do not provide much basis for optimism. The situation continued to be dominated by violence and terrorism that continued to claim innocent lives, by the absence of a peace process and even dialogue between the parties and by further deterioration of the humanitarian crisis in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Ukraine has on many occasions expressed its condemnation of terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians, including suicide bombings and rocket attacks. We totally reject all forms of terrorism and call on the Palestinian Authority to do everything in its power to stop that abhorrent practice and to take action against the planners and perpetrators. It is our firm belief that the attacks are not bringing the Palestinian people closer to the fulfilment of their legitimate aspirations for a Palestinian State.

In the same vein, the legitimate right of Israel to self-defence cannot justify the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force, extrajudicial killings and the excessive destruction of private and public property, including Palestinian Authority institutions. Israel should abandon those practices and fully abide by its obligations under international humanitarian law, especially under the Fourth Geneva Convention. Resort to military force will not bring genuine security to Israel and its people.

The entire history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, especially over the last four years, is convincing testimony to the fact that the path of violence leads nowhere and only undermines the efforts to find peaceful solutions. One cannot impose peace and security by means of violence or military force. It is only through peaceful dialogue and the political process that a comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be found.

Ukraine reaffirms its commitment to the negotiated two-State solution to the conflict, which would end the occupation that began in 1967 and result in the creation of a viable, contiguous, sovereign and

independent Palestinian State existing side by side in peace with Israel and living within recognized and secure borders. The Quartet's road map represents a viable route to achieving such a goal. It is a well-balanced and realistic peace plan that enjoys the unanimous support of the international community and gives the Israeli and Palestinian peoples a real chance to end their long and painful conflict.

All final status issues should be agreed by the parties at negotiations based on the terms of reference of the Madrid Peace Conference; the principle of land for peace; Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003); agreements previously reached by the parties; and the initiative of Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah, which was endorsed by the Arab League at its Beirut Summit in March 2002.

We strongly believe that both parties to the conflict should refrain from any actions that could prejudge the outcome of the negotiations. At this point I would like to recall the offer of Ukraine to provide its good offices for holding peace negotiations on its territory.

Ukraine welcomes Israel's intention to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and from parts of the West Bank as a step that can open the possibility of restarting progress on the road map and create new opportunities for peacemaking between Israelis and Palestinians. We support the relevant conditions laid down by the European Union and the Quartet, in particular, that the initiative should take place in the context of the road map and become a step towards the two-State solution, that the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip is full and complete and that the handover of responsibility is coordinated with the Palestinian Authority and the international community. Ukraine stands ready to contribute to the efforts of the international community and to assist the parties in that endeavour.

The international community — including the Quartet, the United Nations and the Security Council, countries of the region and other international players — has an important role to play in providing the parties with the support and cooperation they need on their way to peace. Ultimately, however, it is the parties themselves that will have to display courage and good will and demonstrate readiness to make the painful compromises needed for fulfilling the mutual obligations outlined in the road map. The path ahead is difficult, but it promises hope. The path backward promises nothing but a return to the abyss of violence and despair.

A comprehensive Middle East settlement would be impossible without peace agreements on the Israeli-Lebanese and Israeli-Syrian tracks that are aimed at ending the occupation of the Arab territories and normalizing relations with Israel. We are encouraged by the signals, including, recently, that about the possibility of the resumption of negotiations on both issues, and hope that they will lead to a revitalization of the peace process in the Middle East.

Meanwhile, in view of the tense situation in the region and its potential for further escalation, we call on all parties to exercise maximum restraint and to respect the principles of international law and relevant Security Council resolutions.

Ukraine will continue to support the efforts of the international community to advance the peace process and establish peace in the Middle East. In 2000 my country contributed an engineering battalion to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon to perform demining in South Lebanon and thus to help return that area to normal life. Ukraine stands ready to expand its contribution to those efforts and is preparing a peacekeeping battalion to be dispatched to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force.

I would like to express the hope that through joint efforts of the parties concerned and the international community, the Middle East will become a region where all peoples live in peace, security, prosperity and dignity, to which they aspire and that they deserve.

Mr. Mayoral (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the pleasure of speaking on behalf of the delegations of Argentina and Brazil on agenda item 36, entitled "The situation in the Middle East", and agenda item 37, entitled "Question of Palestine". Our delegations would like to avail themselves of this opportunity to express once again the sorrow of the peoples and Governments of Argentina and Brazil on the recent passing of President Yasser Arafat, the historic leader of the cause of establishing an independent and sovereign Palestinian State. We are convinced that the Palestinian leaders who succeed him will continue to work constructively to further that legitimate aspiration of the Palestinian people.

The international community is observing with great expectations the current developments in the

Middle East, convinced that there is room for a certain optimism about the future. Like other States, Argentina and Brazil believe that the road map is the best tool at our disposal to advance peace negotiations with a view to the full implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002).

Our understanding is that the net result of the peace process would be two sovereign and independent States, coexisting in peace with their neighbours within internationally recognized and secure borders — Israel and a sovereign, democratic, economically viable and contiguous Palestinian State.

The full implementation of the road map is an indispensable prerequisite to the realization of that vision. In that context, our delegations would like to underscore the importance of two events that should take place in the region in the forthcoming months, on which — in the opinion of Argentina and Brazil — the fate of the peace process depends.

First is the conducting of free, fair and democratic elections for the presidency of the Palestinian Authority on 9 January 2005. In that connection, all necessary conditions should be guaranteed for the process to take place without major obstacles, with full participation and without any restrictions, so that the new Palestinian leadership that emerges will have the legitimacy and the representative character that are required in the circumstances so that it can be successful.

Secondly, there must be successful implementation of the Israeli plan for withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. At the same time that we welcome the initiative of the Israeli Government, we stress that it should fulfil certain prerequisites. The withdrawal should be coordinated beforehand with the Palestinian Authority in order to avoid a power vacuum. It must be complete and be accompanied by similar steps in the West Bank, and it should be compatible with the road map.

We hope that those two events will take place in a peaceful atmosphere and will contribute to building confidence between the parties with a view to establishing a solid base for subsequent phases of the peace process. We also appeal to the parties to exercise moderation at this critical phase in the situation of the region. At the same time that we strongly condemn all acts of violence and terrorism that affect the civilian population on both sides, we would like to reiterate that the conflict cannot and will not be resolved by force.

We reiterate that both parties should fully respect international humanitarian law and the applicable human rights norms. In particular, we would like to emphasize that Israel should comply with its obligations in its capacity as the occupying Power in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. We believe that measures that negatively affect the rights and freedoms of the civilian population must be suspended, such as restrictions on freedom of movement, settlement activities and the construction of the security barrier in the occupied territories.

The stabilization of the situation in the Middle East depends on concrete progress, not only in the talks between Palestinians and Israelis, but also on the other aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is essential that the parties involved resume contact in order to put an end to occupation the situations that persist in the region in contravention of international law, in particular the Charter of the United Nations and of the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. In that context we add our voice to the appeals for the resumption of the negotiations between Israel and Syria on the Golan Heights that have been occupied by Israel since 1967.

With regard to the situation in southern Lebanon, we reiterate our request to the parties to respect the Blue Line and to refrain from taking measures that could lead to an increase of tension in the area.

We also recall our position on the status of Jerusalem, a solution of which should take into account the legitimate concerns of both Israelis and Palestinians and should ensure the freedom of religion and conscience of all its inhabitants, as well as permanent, free and unhindered access to the holy places by people of all religions and nationalities.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our support for the role played by the United Nations in the Middle East situation. We very much appreciate the role of the United Nations agencies in providing humanitarian assistance in the field to mitigate the suffering of the Palestinian people. At the same time, we believe that this Organization and its principal organs, in particular the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Secretariat, have a relevant role to play in advancing the peace process.

Brazil and Argentina reiterate their willingness to make the most positive contribution to fostering the legitimate aspirations of the peoples of the region.

Ms. Al-Mulla (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): Today, the General Assembly is discussing one of the most important items on its agenda and one that is closely related to international peace and security.

The Middle East region has, for many decades, not witnessed any stability, in spite of its vitality and centrality, owing to the wars that have afflicted the region and depleted its potential, resources and capabilities, at the level of States and at that of the people.

One of the most serious problems in the region, which makes its security and stability subject to further deterioration, is the persistence by the Israeli Government in implementing its illegal practices and policies, its rejection of peaceful initiatives and its creation of hurdles and obstacles impeding international efforts aimed at finding a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Israeli Government has chosen a path that is based on the use of force to impose security at a time when it continues to occupy Palestinian and Arab territories. This equation has proved a failure, and its continued application will only lead to further deterioration in the security, political and economic situation of the region.

Kuwait follows with serious concern the tragic situation of the Palestinian people in the occupied Arab territories. The continued deterioration in the standards of living of the Palestinian people, both economically and socially, owing to the policies and practices of Israel, which contradict international law and norms and international humanitarian laws through a series of detentions, suppression, firing on unarmed civilians, destruction of houses, confiscation of land, laying siege to Palestinian towns and villages, and the imposition of strict conditions on the movement of Palestinian people, in addition to political assassinations of Palestinian eminent personalities and symbols, is but one of the reasons for that deterioration. It is regrettable that these criminal acts by the Israeli occupation forces are being committed blatantly and publicly, before the entire world, without deterrence or fear of any accountability or denunciation, as if Israel truly does not care about the international reaction to its practices.

It is illogical that the international community continues to be preoccupied with the manoeuvres and pretexts created by Israel, invoking its own security at a time when it aims basically at distracting us from the crux of the conflict, which is the continued occupation.

In spite of intense international efforts under the leadership of the Quartet, leading to the road map and the establishment of a specific time frame to guarantee the Palestinian people their legitimate political rights, the Israeli Government continues to shirk its responsibilities and to fail to implement its obligations in accordance with many initiatives. It continues to reject the resumption of negotiations, leading to further violence, tension and instability. We are witnessing this state of affairs daily in the occupied territories.

The State of Kuwait reiterates its commitment to the struggle of the Palestinian people to regain all their legitimate political rights, including the establishment of their own independent State on their own territory, with Al-Quds as its capital. Therefore, we demand that the Israeli Government implement all the provisions of the resolutions of international legitimacy, foremost among which are resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1515 (2003), together with the principle of land for peace, and the bilateral agreements that Israel signed with the Palestinian Authority within the framework of the peace process. Furthermore, it should also implement all the provisions of the road map; put an end to its policies of besieging towns and villages and starving the people; cease its repeated military campaigns in the areas under the Palestinian Authority and cease its destruction of the infrastructure, houses and policies of detention and establishment of settlements.

We would like to reiterate the importance of the sanctity and non-violability of holy places, particularly the Al-Aqsa Mosque. We also reiterate the Arab character of the city of Jerusalem and reject any Israeli measures for its Judaization or annexation. We demand the release of all Palestinian detainees and reassert the necessity for the international community to bring pressure to bear on the Israeli Government to abide by the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, which are being violated daily.

Regarding the separation wall, the international community has been aware of Israel's designs in the field of settlements. Therefore, the General Assembly, in its tenth emergency special session last July, adopted

a resolution demanding that the Government of Israel cease the construction of the illegal wall, and respect the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. The International Court of Justice has decided that that wall is illegal and contradicts resolutions of international legitimacy, and requested that Israel remove it and compensate Palestinians that were harmed by its construction.

Kuwait renews its demand to Israel to withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967 and to implement the relevant Security Council resolutions, particularly resolution 497 (1981), and reaffirms that continued Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan and its attempts to annex it constitute a great hurdle impeding the establishment of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region.

We reaffirm the illegality of Israeli activities in the occupied Syrian Golan. We reiterate our support for our Lebanese brothers and assure them of our continued support of their just demands. We call on Israel to withdraw from the remaining Lebanese territories in compliance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978) and to put an end to its continued threats against Lebanon and to respect its sovereignty.

In conclusion, we reaffirm that a just, comprehensive and lasting peace cannot be achieved as long as the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, occupied since 1967, continues. We also reaffirm our support and our commitment to the Arab peace initiative endorsed at the Beirut Summit in 2002, as it constitutes one of the main pillars of the peace process that can bring peace and security to the region, which is the aspiration of all. The Israeli Government should realize that security is an essential demand and the right of all peoples and countries of the region and that it is not limited to Israel alone. That vision of the Arab-Israeli conflict constitutes an integral part of Kuwait's comprehensive vision for the Middle East, which is based on the principles of stability, mutual respect and cooperation among all parties in seeking to settle conflicts through dialogue and understanding, and reflects the noble principles of the United Nations Charter concerning relations among States and the peoples of the world.

Mr. Oubida (Burkina Faso) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I join preceding speakers in paying a heartfelt tribute to the memory of Yasser Arafat, President of the Palestinian Authority, who was so abruptly taken from his affectionate place among the Palestinian people at a crucial moment for the future of the entire region of the Middle East. My delegation firmly believes that the ideal to which he dedicated his life will prevail.

The current discussion takes place at a time when the situation and the political equilibrium of the entire Middle East is more precarious than ever. Iraq has come under the fire of the crusade against terrorism. The future of Iran is of great concern. The peace plan set out in the Quartet's road map seems to be fading into oblivion.

The war initiated in Iraq in the name of the fight against terrorism has now continued almost a year and eight months and is ravaging the country, with consequences such as the mass displacement of the population, attacks on innocent civilians, hunger and disease, hostage-takings and thousands of victims. Burkina Faso is deeply concerned at that situation and calls upon the occupying Powers and the international community as a whole to work for the rapid restoration of the sovereignty of the country.

In that spirit, Burkina Faso welcomes the recent conference on Iraq held in Sharm el Sheikh and its outcome. Measures taken at the Sharm el Sheikh conference and the Paris Club's decision for debt cancellation will enable the Government that will be established in Iraq pursuant to the elections scheduled for 2005 to rebuild Iraq so that it can recover its rightful place in the international community.

It has encouraging that agreements have been reached between the Government of Iran and the European Union on Iran's nuclear programme. We call on the parties to pursue their dialogue in order to arrive at a political solution that is acceptable to all. However, Burkina Faso would like to stress that the proliferation of nuclear weapons poses a threat to the entire region and should be dealt with comprehensively.

What can one say of the situation in the occupied territories? It seem not to have improved since the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, but deteriorated. The plundering of resources, targeted assassinations and extrajudicial killings, the destruction of dwellings and systematic restrictions on the movements of Palestinians have been the daily lot of the peoples of the occupied territories. How can we not draw attention to the settlements, which constitute

a growing obstacle to any return of the occupied territories to their original owners, thus exacerbating hatred towards the occupiers of those lands and complicating any lasting reconciliation?

The recent initiative of the occupying Power to build a wall around the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, entails grave consequences because it touches on the heart and soul of the Palestinian conflict. It creates facts on the ground and leaves no alternative to the reprehensible acts carried out in retaliation by the victims.

Burkina Faso has experienced at first hand the horror of occupation and thus knows the price paid in a struggle for liberation. Today, technological advances have made that situation even more costly and bloody. Unless reason prevails, the entire region runs the risk of sinking. Burkina Faso believes that the road map, so painstakingly elaborated by the Quartet, constitutes the one and only route to a just and lasting settlement to the Palestinian question and to a relaxation of the tensions in the region. We note with optimism that, despite their very brutal conflict, the two parties have shown a certain high-mindedness in accepting the road map, its limits and its advantages.

Thus, it is possible to have hope. We encourage the parties to go further in implementing the relevant provisions of the road map without delay. Only through joint sacrifice will we be able one day to welcome the implementation, in deed and in spirit, of Security Council resolution 1397 (2001), resulting in the creation of a Palestinian State, living side by side with the State of Israel within secure and recognized borders.

President Arafat has departed without knowing the joy of seeing an independent Palestine, the essential goal of his lifelong struggle. Out of respect and duty to the memory of that great leader, we must break the wall of ice that has frozen all political dialogue for more than three years and establish without delay a timetable enabling the resumption of negotiations on the basis of the road map and under the guidance of the Quartet.

There is no need for my delegation to recall that success in future negotiations requires the establishment of a new Palestinian Authority with broad popular support. To that end, the international community, in whose efforts Burkina Faso will participate as far as possible according to its means, must give the necessary support to the interim leaders in order properly to prepare the elections scheduled for January 2005.

The Acting President: We have just heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 36 for this meeting.

One representative has requested to exercise the right of reply. May I remind members that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

I call on the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Alaei (Islamic Republic of Iran): Today, the General Assembly heard a number of irrelevant comments, as well as fabricated and baseless allegations, made by the representative of Israel against my country.

Since my delegation has already expressed its position on the item under consideration, namely, the situation in the Middle East, I will not delve into responding to those irrelevant and baseless remarks at this stage. However, as a matter of clarification and as a reply to those unrelated and unsubstantiated comments, I would like to make the following brief remarks.

The aggressive Israeli policy and inhumane practices towards the Palestinians and other nations in the region have indeed rendered that sensitive part of the world more volatile as ever. Israel's attempt to pretend to be an advocate of peace is pure myth. Indeed, its State terrorism and aggression are deliberate attempts to preclude and torpedo any possibility to bring peace to the region that has been sadly engulfed in a whirlpool of tensions and conflicts for so many decades. Israel cannot and should not blame others for the creation of this dangerous situation. It is an open secret that Iran has always been sympathetic to and supportive of the cause of the Palestinian people: this support has always been of a moral and political nature.

The Israeli representative also attempted to distort the facts relating to Iran's peaceful nuclear programme. The irony is that the Israeli regime has never been a party to the internationally negotiated instruments on weapons of mass destruction nor has it

paid attention to the constant calls in other relevant forums. It is worth mentioning that the only existing obstacle to the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East is the non-adherence of Israel to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and its continued clandestine operation of unsafeguarded nuclear facilities.

In contrast, the Islamic Republic of Iran, as a party to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction, and the NPT, is committed to all provisions of those instruments and to making declarations and accepting international monitoring by the competent international bodies. It has always demonstrated that it would not seek any weapons of mass destruction.

Programme of work

The Acting President: I would like to inform members that, at the request of the sponsors, action on draft resolutions under agenda item 36, "The situation in the Middle East", and agenda item 37, "Question of Palestine", will be taken tomorrow morning, Wednesday, 1 December.

The Assembly will first take action on draft resolutions A/59/L.34 through L.37, under agenda item 37, followed by action on draft resolutions A/59/L.39, as orally corrected, and A/59/L.40, under agenda item 36.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.